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SUBJECT Review of William Casey's Career

TOM BROKAW: Ironically, one day after [Richard] Secord described the active interest of William Casey in the Contra connection, the former Director of the CIA died of complications brought on by an operation for a cancerous brain tumor. Casey was 74 years old. And as NBC's Art Kent reports tonight, as Director of the CIA, Casey's part in the Iran-Contra affair and other operations was substantial and controversial.

WILLIAM CASEY: I assure you that all the things we've done have been fully authorized by the Executive Branch and by laws and by our reporting and briefing of the Congress.

ART KENT: When William Casey made that statement, the secret shipment of arms to Iran had been underway for nine months, and it would be another eight months before Congress was to learn of the Iran deal.

Despite the Iran-Contra controversy, many, especially in the intelligence community, credit Casey with rebuilding the CIA, which had been badly damaged by wholesale dismissals and resignations in the years before Ronald Reagan became President.

DEPUTY CIA DIRECTOR ROBERT GATES: He restored our morale, our sense of purpose and mission.

KENT: But when Casey was first appointed, the fortune he had amassed on Wall Street became the basis of intense questions about his financial holdings. Casey was forced to place them in a blind trust, and from that time made no secret of his dislike for Congress, especially in the area of secret operations.

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ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: He decided that you couldn't trust the Congress, and we've had a rupture of relations between the intelligence community and the Congress.

KENT: Relations worsened with revelations of the Iran arms deal. Casey was back before Congress, with some members accusing him of being deliberately vague.

Just yesterday, retired Air Force Major General Richard Secord testified that Casey, if not personally involved, certainly knew about the illegal Contra resupply operation.

Congress would still like to know more about Casey's role.

SENATOR DANIEL INOUE: Obviously, Mr. Casey has taken certain information to the grave with him.

KENT: President Reagan said he had lost a longtime supporter and adviser.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: And there's no question about our sorrow about that. We've lost a very devoted friend and a great public servant.

KENT: Nonetheless, the unanswered questions about his involvement in the Iran-Contra affair will always shadow William Casey's contribution to the secret side of government.